

Union Wharf - Building (19-22)
Commercial St., opposite foot of Union St.
Portland
Cumberland County
Maine

HABS No. ME-114

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
801 19th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

UNION WHARF - BUILDING (19-22)

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Location: Commercial Street, opposite foot of Union Street,
Portland, Cumberland County, Maine.

Present Owner: Proprietors of Union Wharf.

Present Occupant: W. H. Shurtleff Salt Company

Present Use: Warehouse

Statement of Significance: Union Wharf, probably the oldest commercial wharf in Portland, has a wharf street with flanking building complexes. Building (19-22), part of east group, is composed of what were originally four warehouses leased from the proprietors for rum and molasses storage. Construction details and wooden hoist machinery are of particular interest.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Records of the proprietors dating from 1792, show that the company originally consisted of sixteen Portland men (including members of the merchant families, Storer, Mussey, McLellan, Boyd, Jewett, and Preble) and three men from other towns. The company has continued as a group of proprietors to the present time.
2. Date of erection: Undetermined, probably between 1794 and 1806.

Note: Records of the Proceedings of the Proprietors of Union Wharf, 1792 ff., do not indicate clearly what was actually built or exactly when. Vote in 1799 that a sum be raised from the shareholders "for the purpose of completing so much wharf as will accomodate such Props., as shall wish to Build stores thereon this present year" is a typical entry. The wharf was voted in 1793; later in the same year the name "Union Wharf" was adopted. In 1793 and 1794 additions to first building, built in 1792, were voted. These first buildings were apparently on dry land at head of wharf, which was not built until 1794. In 1797, 1799 and 1800 additional structures were voted. A building 120 feet long was built in 1801; another building was ordered in 1804 (no record of its having been built),

and one was voted in 1806 and was certainly built. Aside 3-PORT
from buildings erected in 1793 and 1794, there were thus at 10-
least five, probably six, buildings built on the wharf be-
fore 1807. Records from 1806 into the 1850's show no new
buildings.

A shed demolished on Union Wharf in 1962 had the date 1794 carved on one of its beams, according to a work-man interviewed on June 23, 1962. Structural members of this building, still on the wharf in 1962, were identical with those in the buildings still standing. However, the presence of rotary saw marks on the knee supports seems to preclude an early date (i.e., before 1807). The rotary saw, said to have been a Shaker invention, was in use in Maine in the early 1830's, but evidence for its earlier use requires further research. Photograph of molasses shed formerly on adjacent Widgery's Wharf shows building very similar to those on Union Wharf, but knee braces appear to be hewn, not sawn. Photograph is in possession of W. Parker Poole, Sr., who believes building to date from c. 1800.

3. Architect: None known.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: None known.
5. Alterations and additions: Wharf extended to Fore Street until after about 1851, when Commercial Street was created from fill. Union Wharf Proprietors ceded fifty feet gratis to City of Portland for right of way and are said by W. Parker Poole, Sr. to have sold the property above the new street for about \$40 per running foot. Wharf is presently approximately 1,100 feet long. Two-story sheds 20' deep were apparently added on water side of original four units of building (19-22) at undetermined dates.
6. Important old views: An 1884 survey map of Union Wharf and two flanking wharves records owners of the twenty-eight units. An undated earlier map (before Merrill's Wharf was extended) shows the storage uses of Union Wharf sheds, wood, coal, steamboat freight, salt, flour, feed and grain, miscellaneous storage, and packing fish. An undated, faded photographic view down the wharf from Commercial Street shows something of the buildings and masts of shipping. Maps and view are in possession of W. Parker Poole, Sr.

A new and correct plan of Portland, Maine by Abel Bowen, 1826 and a map of the city of Portland with the latest improvements by John Cullum, 1836 show buildings on north side of wharf but none on south side. Map of the city of Portland by Henry F. Walling, 1851, shows dotted lines flanking

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railroad track indicating projected line of Commercial Street and four long buildings south of tracks on east, one on west side of wharf. A map dated 1866 shows spur track down wharf street. F. W. Beers and others, Atlas of Cumberland County (New York: F. W. Beers, 1871) shows four buildings, warehouses 1-12, 13-23, 24-28 and U.S. Bonded Warehouse No 60 on east side of wharf, four large buildings on west side. These maps are in Map Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

Site has been owned by Proprietors of Union Wharf since 1792 and is probably oldest commercial wharf extant in Portland. During the War of 1812 rum from a captured British ship was unloaded at Union Wharf and carted to Gorham to avoid retaliation. After battle between American brig Enterprise and the British brig Boxer on September 5, 1813, the bodies of William Burrows, the American commander, and Captain Samuel Blyth of the Boxer, both killed in action, were rowed ashore at Union Wharf, whence they were conveyed with solemnity to the burying ground.

c. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: Records of Proceedings of Proprietors of Union Wharf, manuscripts, 1792 to the present, in possession of W. Parker Poole, Sr., President and Treasurer, and W. Parker Poole, Jr., Wharfinger, W. H. Shurtleff and Company, Union Wharf, Portland, Maine. Maps and photographs with Proprietors' records. Interviews (1962 and 1965) with the Messrs. Poole and an unidentified workman (1962).
2. Secondary and published sources: "Along the Waterfront" in Portland Press Herald, January 22, 1962 reproduces photograph which gives clear view of framing during demolition of shed. Maps in Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. listed above.

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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: One of the few remaining examples of early maritime-commercial architecture in Maine, this complex is part of a wharf street paralleled by warehouses with loading platforms and slips at their rears. Building (19-22), recorded in detail, is typical of the group and has noteworthy structural elements.
2. Condition of fabric: Early framing members are generally sound; some posts and sills are badly decayed. Exterior sheathing is in poor condition; fragments of early siding and shingles remain.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Building (19-22) is 101'-1" x 50'-10½", has rectangular open plan, two stories, essentially four wide bays (fenestration varies). Structure was formerly four warehouses, each 25' x 50'-10½".
2. Foundations: Portion of foundation visible from slip is composed of wooden piles and beams. Remainder is probably wooden cribbing with stone fill, similar to foundation of recently destroyed building on same wharf.
3. Wall construction: Old and new siding combines areas of clapboards, shingles, and building paper, some of latter secured by vertical wooden battens. Old clapboards have 3" exposure, feathered joints, and are nailed at random to 1"-thick sheathing supported by 3-½" x 4" studs set at an average of 20" on center. Nails are handmade, have round and tapered heads.
4. Framing: Main structural members are hewn posts and beams averaging approximately 9' x 9' to 12 x 12' joined by mortises and tenons and secured with trenails. Posts are set at average of 8'-4½" on center. Angles between posts and beams below second floor are braced by knees secured with iron nuts and bolts.
5. Chimneys: Two small brick chimneys are thimble for stove pipe.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Of four doorways, 6'-8" to 7'-8" wide, at street level, three have hinged paired vertical plank doors, and one a tongue-and-groove vertical

plank sliding door of the type known as "car siding" door. One second-floor doorway is sealed up. Two openings have hinged vertical plank single doors; remaining opening has similar doors in pair.

- b. Windows: Old and modern fixed and double-hung wooden six-over-six-light, two-over-two-light, and six-over-two-light sash windows are randomly placed.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof, ridge parallel with front, is covered with composition roll roofing on boards.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Boxed eaves have fragments of modern molded wooden cornice, some sheet metal guttering.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: Large open space is interrupted only by posts. Appears to have once been 28'-8½" deep; evidence indicates that shed 19'-8" deep was added later. Stairs to second floor are set against front wall.
- b. Second floor: Large open storage space has one area partitioned for separate storage, office 7' x 16' in southwest corner, and small privy in southeast corner.

2. Stairways: One rough wooden straight-run stairway of twelve risers (9" risers, 9½" treads) is set against west wall.

3. Flooring: Wooden boards vary in width up to 23" and are supported on 6" x 6" joists averaging 24" on center set into 9½" x 8" hewn beams. Attic space is partially floored over. Four hatches, two with wooden hoist wheels in attic above, are cut into second floor.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Exposed studs and joists have no plaster finish. Second-floor partitions have horizontal 1"-thick boards nailed to posts and studs on one side only. Some shingles remain on former exterior face of what was shed wall running east-west from rear to line of interior posts.

5. Doorways and doors: Office, privy, and office closet have wooden doors.

6. Notable hardware: Exterior second-floor doors have good wrought iron strap hinges, apparently original. There are miscellaneous early wrought iron hinges, hooks, and threaded bolts and nuts (at knee braces) throughout premises.

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D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Building (19-22) is at approximate center of long row of buildings on east side of Union Wharf and faces west between the wharf street and the slip between Union and Widgery's wharves. Union Wharf is on Commercial Street opposite the foot of Union Street.
2. Enclosures, outbuildings, walks, landscaping: None.

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